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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 002852

SIPDIS

NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR J. FRAZER  
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY  
PARIS FOR C. NEARY  
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/01/2012

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: DISCOVERY OF BODIES IN ABANDONED WELL

Classified By: Political Officer Audu Besmer for reasons 1.5 b/d

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: On December 10 police in Nkayi District (in Matabeleland North Province) reportedly retrieved five skeletons from an abandoned well near the town of Lukona. A local war veteran, implicated in a previous case of murder by torture freely accompanied police when the bodies were retrieved. Fearful residents want to know the fate of their loved ones, but police have admitted to finding only one body. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 10 police in Nkayi District (in Matabeleland North Province) reportedly retrieved five skeletons from an abandoned well near the town of Lukona. The BBC, which also reported the story, and the Daily News reported the site was a defunct "dip tank" (a tank usually about six feet deep for dipping cattle in a pesticide bath). But according to the government-owned weekly Bulawayo Sunday News, and Nkayi MDC MP Abednico Bhebhe who is in touch with local residents and a police officer in Nkayi, the site was an abandoned well about 100 feet deep.

#### Body Parts

[1](#)3. (SBU) (Note: In April 2002, the independent weekly Financial Gazette reported that residents of Lenkubini, another village in Nkayi District, found a hand floating in a dip tank there. According to Shari Eppl of Amani Trust, a local human rights NGO, and Bhebhe, residents reported that police guarded the site overnight while two to three skeletons were removed. Later the official police report said no bodies were found. News reporters may be confusing the two sites. End Note.)

#### Missing Bodies

[1](#)4. (C) The Lukona investigation and finding arose when villagers noticed that a ZANU-PF youth militia member, known only as Mazolo, was missing from the area. They questioned and beat other ZANU-PF youths in the area, who eventually confessed to killing their colleague and dumping his body in the abandoned well. The villagers informed Nkayi police, who arrested ZANU-PF youth militia member Mandla Ncube. According to Bhebhe, who has a contact inside the Nkayi police department, Ncube confessed the killing to police and revealed that war veterans had killed and dumped bodies of MDC members in the well during the March 2002 election period. According to the government-owned Bulawayo Sunday News the 'one' skeleton found belongs to Freedom Ncube--killed by cattle thieves for threatening to reveal them.

#### The Killer Next Door

[1](#)5. (C) The Daily News reported that a local war veteran commonly known as Khiwa accompanied police to the well at Lukona on December 10. According to Bhebhe, Mandla Ncube fingered Khiwa as responsible for the deaths of those in the well. According to Bhebhe, two other MDC members abducted on February 6, 2002 and tortured for a month at an underground military-style bunker in Nguana (Nkayi District), Newman Bhebhe and Van Dube, had subsequently reported in signed affidavits to police that Khiwa (whose real name is Esa Ngwenya) was their lead captor. The two were abducted along with a third MDC member, Tembendi Ndebele, who died during the episode at the bunker. Amani Trust interviewed Van Dube and documented the medical evidence of his torture. The three had been sent to Mateme (Nkayi district) to set up an MDC rally ahead of the presidential contest. According to Bhebhe, Khiwa is affiliated with the CIO, and investigated alleged dissidents for the GOZ during the Matabeleland Massacres in the 1980s.

[1](#)6. (SBU) Bhebhe reported that torture sites were also set up in bush areas near Lukona, Bona and Isifisosikazulu (Nkayi District) in the run-up to the March 2002 presidential challenge.

Comment:

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17. (C) Nkayi district witnessed some of the worst violence in the country leading up to the March 2002 elections; dozens of people are still missing. Residents were visibly afraid to talk to Poloff during a visit there in September 2002, but they are also reportedly eager to know if any of the bodies found belong to people they know. Given that police are admitting to finding only one body at Lukona, it seems unlikely that the identities of the rest of the victims will ever be revealed. It is also disturbing that Khiwa, who appears to have been implicated for torturing and killing MDC members in other cases, accompanied police to the Lukona well, and is able to move about freely. Police seem to be caught between grieving and fearful fellow residents who want answers, and ZANU-PF authorities who would rather hide the truth. Ever more concerned with their own safety and putting food on the table, it appears unlikely that rural Nkayi residents would stand up to ZANU-PF authorities and insist on a thorough investigation. End Comment.  
SULLIVAN